

STATEMENT OF JANET SNYDER MATTHEWS, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR CULTURAL RESOURCES, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 105, TO DIRECT THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO CONDUCT A STUDY OF THE SUITABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING THE NORTHERN NECK NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA IN VIRGINIA, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 105, a bill to direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study of the suitability and feasibility of establishing the Northern Neck National Heritage Area in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The Department supports enactment of H.R. 105. However, we believe that any funding requested should be directed first toward completing previously authorized studies.

The Department continues to recommend that Congress enact program legislation for national heritage area studies and designations. The Administration's proposal for national heritage area program legislation was transmitted to Congress during the 109th Congress. Bills were introduced that incorporated the majority of the provisions of the Administration's proposal, and S. 243 passed the Senate. During the 110th Congress, a similar heritage area program bill, S. 278, has been introduced, and we look forward to continuing to work with Congress on this very important issue.

With 37 national heritage areas designated across 27 states, and more heritage area legislative proposals in the pipeline, the Administration believes it is critical at this juncture for Congress to enact national heritage area program legislation. This legislation would provide a much-needed framework for evaluating proposed national heritage areas, offering guidelines for successful planning and management, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all parties, and standardizing timeframes and funding for designated areas. Program legislation also would clarify the expectation that heritage areas would work toward self-sufficiency by outlining the necessary steps, including appropriate planning, to achieve that shared goal.

H.R. 105 would authorize the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with appropriate State historic preservation officers, State historical societies, and other appropriate organizations, to conduct a study of the Northern Neck area and to evaluate if it meets the criteria for heritage area designation. The Secretary would be required to submit a report to Congress, no later than three years after funds are made available, on the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.

The study area for the Northern Neck National Heritage Area includes a part of Virginia between the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers including the counties of Westmoreland, Northumberland, Richmond, King George, and Lancaster, as well as other adjacent or nearby areas that have similar heritage aspects. The Northern Neck of Virginia was described by its first European visitor, Captain John Smith as, "A place where heaven and earth never agreed better to frame man's habitation." George Washington summed it up more concisely as, "the Garden of Virginia." The Northern Neck was not only the birthplace of our first President, but that of James

Madison, our fourth, and James Monroe, our fifth. The region includes the George Washington Birthplace National Monument, a unit of the National Park System.

The Northern Neck comprises an important collection of historic and natural resources. National historic landmarks include Menokin, the home of Frances Lightfoot Lee, member of the Continental Congress and signer of the Declaration of independence and the Articles of Confederation; Mount Airy, one of the few major 18th century Virginia plantation houses built of stone; Spence's Point, home of influential American writer John Roderigo Dos Passos; Historic Christ Church, built in 1735 by Robert "King" Carter, one of the wealthiest and most influential citizens in colonial America; and, Stratford Hall, the boyhood home of Richard Henry Lee and Francis Lightfoot Lee and the birthplace of Confederate Army General Robert E. Lee. Within the region, too, are the Caledon Natural Area, a national natural landmark; Westmoreland State Park, constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s; and Belle Isle State Park, an area of 733 acres including 7 miles of shoreline, tidal wetlands, agricultural fields and upland forests.

The Northern Neck has a rich history of agricultural and maritime endeavors. Productive soils and the history of agriculture in the region fostered agricultural traditions that continue into modern times. Kinsale, on the Yeocomico River, was an early ship building center and became a thriving steamboat landing during the late 19th century. It first experienced the difficulties of war in 1812, when the town was occupied and burned by the British. During the Civil War, Kinsale served as a base of operations for blockade runners and was bombarded by the Union Navy. The heritage of the Chesapeake Bay's watermen and their unique boats can be explored at the Port Kinsale Maritime Museum. At the Reedville Fishermen's Museum, the Northern Neck's important menhaden fishing industry and watermen's heritage is examined. The fishing industry

was an important economic enterprise and Reedville was said to be the richest town per capita in the United States in the early 1900s. The prosperity of that era can be seen in the fine Victorian mansions in Reedville's Main Street historic district.

Today, the Northern Neck of Virginia remains relatively unpopulated and retains many of the attributes that were known to its earlier settlers and our nation's first leaders. It is an area worthy of study for potential designation as a national heritage area.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the committee may have.